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Preparing Community Groups for a Pandemic

Plan Now for a Pandemic Influenza

Although public health influenza pandemic planning efforts began years ago, 2007 may find other organizations without a formal written plan.

A flu pandemic likely will cause high rates of absenteeism from work and school; up to 40 percent of employees may be home sick or caring for sick family members. A written plan will allow those who may need to step in during a pandemic to carry out duties and fill jobs. A pandemic flu plan should contain steps your organization will take to minimize the effects of a flu pandemic on the organization and the people it serves.

There is no single template for drafting a pandemic flu plan – plans should be tailored to the organization – but continuity of operations is an important concept to consider when planning for any emergency.

Continuity of operations planning for a pandemic determines how your organization will continue to provide needed products or services if up to 40 percent of employees or volunteers are home sick or caring for sick loved ones. This aspect often exists as a component of all-hazard or weather-related emergency plans, which already exist in most organizations.

Adapting existing emergency plans to include pandemic influenza is a good first step. During a pandemic, businesses may consider relaxing employee sick leave policies or implementing telecommuting. Schools should plan for extended closures with alternative teaching methods. Community groups need to recognize and plan for the danger of losing volunteers to illness or care-giving roles. Consider how an influenza pandemic may effect the organization, then address those issues in your emergency plan.

There are many resources available to aide planning efforts. Reach out to other organizations similar in size for help in drafting a plan. Local emergency management agencies and health departments may be able to provide some guidance. Planning resources are also available at <http://www.ohiopandemicflu.gov>.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has a variety of planning tools available including a software package called Flu Aid, designed to assist state and local level planners in preparing for an influenza pandemic; and FluSurge, a model which enables hospital administrators and public health officials to estimate the surge in demand for hospital-based services during an influenza pandemic.

The CDC also has checklists available to spark planning efforts for businesses, schools, communities and local government.

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Planning Suggestions for Faith-based Organizations

During an influenza pandemic – especially a severe one – congregants will turn to their faith and their church or synagogue for guidance. That's why the faith-based community needs to be well informed of the steps local government may take during a pandemic and what they can do to prepare.

At the start of a pandemic, local health districts may need to close businesses, schools and churches to slow the spread of the virus. If the members of your congregation are informed of this possibility ahead of time, there is likely to be far less confusion during the transition to alternative styles of worship.

Faith-based organizations also play an important role as a trusted advisor to their members.

Urging the members of your congregation to begin preparing for an influenza pandemic now may help save their lives when one occurs.

Article submissions

Do you have an idea for an article? Would you like to submit an article you've already written? Contact the editors.

Pandemic flu plans

Want to share your plan with others in Ohio? Contact an editor.

Upcoming events

Contact an editor if you would like us to post your upcoming pandemic influenza meeting or event on this Web site.

Church World Service

The Church World Service Emergency Response Program outlines several ways faith-based organizations can prepare and offers guidance on urging congregation members to prepare. The following information was taken directly from the guide "The Religious Community as Disaster Educator – Planning, Prevention and Mitigation." [Click here](#) to view the entire document.

The religious community can work on disaster prevention by:

Building awareness about disaster-related issues among such groups as men's and women's societies, Sunday School classes, Boy and Girl Scouts and services clubs.

- Maintain contact lists that include:
 - Pastors trained in crisis counseling.
 - Public officials who want to avoid or mitigate an existing or potential problem.
 - Agencies and people working on or responsible for addressing technological hazards in your local, county, state or territory governments.
- Meeting local agency officials and putting a "face" on the area of concern.
 - Ask about plans for emergency services prior to a disaster in your area.
 - Present specific concerns with factual information.

Churches can encourage their members to take some basic steps in their homes to prevent and lessen the effects of disasters or accidents:

- Developing a family disaster plan.
- Writing down emergency telephone numbers.
- Relocating or elevating appliances and electrical service entries in basements.
- Creating "safe rooms" for protection from tornadoes.

Planning considerations for churches:

- Knowing the hazard analysis for your area – what exists today and potential future hazards; possible sources of explosions, contamination and radiation.
- Adequate insurance on buildings and contents.
- Protection of vital records.
- Use of church facilities for shelters and other disaster response needs in cooperation with other care-giving agencies.
- The congregation's resources – people and material – and how they can meet disaster needs.
- A telephone tree or system to check on church member needs when disaster strikes.
- Training for people in the community in disaster preparedness, fire suppression, first-aid, light search and rescue, emotional and spiritual care.
- Telephone numbers/addresses of out-of-town family members, judicatory staff, other support people and agencies.
- Disaster plans of families in the congregation.

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Seasonal Flu Reminder

Seasonal flu viruses are unpredictable and can peak as late as March in Ohio. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides a weekly update on flu activity on its Web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/usmap.htm>

Form healthy habits to protect your self from seasonal flu viruses. Good health habits include:

- Eating a balanced diet including plenty of vegetables, fruits and whole-grain products.
- Drinking plenty of water and going easy on salt, sugar, alcohol and saturated fat.
- Exercising regularly. Thirty or more minutes of physical activity most days of the week can help boost your immunity.
- Getting plenty of rest. Sleep is shown to help your body fight off illness.
- Washing your hands thoroughly and often, especially before eating or cooking and after using the restroom. Use soap and water and scrub for 20 seconds.
- Trying not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread this way.
- Staying away from people who are sick as much as you can.
- Staying home from work or school if you are sick.

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Stay Informed

While lethal bird flu has been noted overseas, there is still the threat of illness from the virus in other parts of the world. The World Health Organization provides complete information about the evolving situation on its Web site: http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/

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